

Maryland is "Working Together" to Fight HIV/AIDS State Observes 22nd Annual AIDS Day

Department of Health & Mental Hygiene News Release

BALTIMORE, MD (December 1, 2010) - The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's (DHMH) Infectious Disease and Environmental Health Administration (IDEHA) today observed the 22nd annual World AIDS Day with health officials and elected leaders at the Central Branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. Presentations addressed the incidence of the disease in Maryland, current public health prevention and treatment programs, the impact of Health Care Reform, and the National HIV/AIDS Strategy aimed at reducing HIV incidence, increasing access to care, optimizing health outcomes and reducing HIV - related health disparities.

"The newly energized federal focus on HIV/AIDS will give Maryland even more tools to defeat one of the most significant public health challenges in a generation," said John M. Colmers, DHMH Secretary. "We can only make a difference in people's lives by '*Working Together*' with our partners at all levels of government, the private sector and the community to stop the transmission of HIV in Maryland." Maryland is ranked highest among U.S. states in AIDS case rates (27.6 cases per 100,000 population) with a rate of more than double the national average (12.3 cases per 100,000 population). There are 29,021 Marylanders reported to be living with HIV/AIDS. There are an estimated 6,000 - 9,000 more individuals who are HIV positive and do not know their status. HIV/AIDS affects every jurisdiction in Maryland.

"This summer, the White House issued the National HIV/AIDS Strategy," said Heather Hauck, Director of IDEHA. "The NHAS provides us with an opportunity to assess and update our HIV and related prevention and care and treatment initiatives in order to achieve the goals of reducing new HIV infections, increasing access to high quality HIV care and treatment, and reducing health disparities in Maryland."

The areas with the highest rates of people living with HIV/AIDS are Baltimore City and Prince Georges, Montgomery, Dorchester, and Baltimore counties respectively. African Americans are disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that 1 in every 71 African Americans in Maryland is reported to be living with HIV/AIDS.

World AIDS Day observance is another way to highlight the resources available to impact the community.

DHMH has worked to ensure that a stable safety net is available for people living with HIV and unable to pay for life saving medications. The Department has provided access to medication to more than 6,200 Marylanders through the federally funded Maryland AIDS Drug Assistance Program (MADAP) and provided comprehensive insurance coverage for more than 1,200 people through MADAP-Plus program.